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M.A. June 1972

The University of Sydney

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THE FORM, DISTRIBUTION AND ANTIQUITY
OF
AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL MORTUARY PRACTICES

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Submitted for the degree of Master of Arts
in the University of Sydney

December, 1971

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the time I have been carrying out research for this thesis, many people have given me references that they thought would be relevant to my work. I endeavoured to keep a list of these people but I fear that some names were probably omitted. I thank everyone who gave me a reference, and apologise to those who are not listed here: Dr. James Allen, Mr. Harry Allen, Dr. Jeremy Beckett, Miss Anne Bickford, Professor Ralph Bulmer, Mr. John Clegg, Mr. Ian Glover, Mr. Brian Hayden, Mr. Rhys Jones, Professor N. W. G. MacIntosh, Mr. David Moore, Professor John Mulvaney, Mr. Nicholas Peterson, Dr. Carmel Steiger, Dr. Peter White.

I wish to particularly thank the following people, who made available to me their unpublished data, photographs and radio carbon dates: Mr. Harry Allen, Miss Sandra Bowdler, Mr. Robert Edwards, Mrs. Laila Haglund-Calley, Dr. Lester Hiatt, Mr. Rhys Jones, Mr. Vincent Megaw and Mr. Alan Thorne.

Miss Winifred Mumford shared some of her technical knowledge with me, and for that I am most grateful. Mrs. Lois White, Mrs. Beverley Fox and Miss Anne Bayliss, I wish to thank for various kinds of help and advice.

Lettercopy of Canberra, I thank for coping with my demands efficiently and calmly; and my special thanks to Mrs. Jean Rees who typed most of my thesis from a difficult-to-read handwritten draft.

I am most grateful to Mr. Rhys Jones who discussed my ideas with me, and read and edited my thesis drafts.

For three years during this research (1966-9) I held a Commonwealth Post-graduate Scholarship in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, and for that I am most grateful.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in Australian Aboriginal mortuary customs began in 1965 at the Hobart ANZAS. At that conference, Dr. L. R. Hiatt delivered a speculative paper in which he discussed, within the context of all Aboriginal mortuary customs, the disposal of a female Aborigine, whose skeleton had been found in a cave in Port Hacking, New South Wales (Megaw 1966b). Hiatt began by observing that:

We appear to be confronted with the remains of a young woman who either died on the kitchen midden or was placed on it after death, and who subsequently underwent no formal disposal. This is odd. First, Aborigines normally did not neglect the bodies of their dead. Second, the corpse was left exposed at a place where people commonly ate (1966: 313).

He then proceeded to examine in detail, the conventional beliefs and practices associated with death among the Australian Aborigines. His general conclusions were that simple disposals were probably associated with fear of the dead, compound disposals with love of, and a desire to retain, the dead.

Some of the distributional implications of Hiatt's comments were of immense interest, but when I looked at the evidence he had used, I realised that no comprehensive studies containing that kind of data, were available. Certainly, many people since the settlement of Australia, had described single events or the customs of a particular area. Some scholars had produced useful syntheses - for example, Roth (1897), Roheim (1925), Bendann (1930) and Davidson (1948a). However, none of these satisfied my concept of what a work on Australian Aboriginal mortuary customs should be. They were either too narrow in the geographical area they covered, or too restricted in the aspects they discussed. Few of them attempted to assess the time each custom had been practised in Australia. Many would have benefited from a more substantial reference list.

With these premature thoughts in mind, I set out to write a grandiose work on Australian Aboriginal mortuary customs. I hoped to analyse all the ethnographic and

archaeological evidence, to compare these results with similar data from areas adjacent to Australia, and finally, with information from hunting societies throughout the world.

I soon discovered why such a work has never been written. The quantity of data available on Australia alone is inhibiting, without adding even the most elementary references from outside. Several months of reading convinced me that I would have to settle for a much more modest scheme. First, I confined my topic to Australia. Second, because one of my major interests was to discover how long various ethnographic customs had been practised in this continent, I concentrated my analysis on mortuary practices rather than on beliefs. Within the category of practices, I stressed those that, in theory, would leave some trace in the archaeological record.

My thesis now consists of a description and distributional analysis of mortuary practices amongst the Australian Aborigines, from the earliest evidence to the present day. In other words: what was the relationship between historic and prehistoric mortuary practices in Aboriginal Australia?

Sources

Much of the data used in this thesis was obtained in Mitchell Library in Sydney, where I examined published and unpublished literature, drawings and photographs. I also made extensive use of the bibliographic service at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra, and spent some time in the state libraries of Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland. I examined registers and material in museums in Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane. By correspondence, I am familiar with relevant material in Hobart and Perth. Some information was acquired by personal communication with, or by the use of notes belonging to scholars who had made field observations, but had not yet written them up.

I do not claim to have read, or even seen, all the available data on mortuary practices, but I have collected a large sample of descriptions, and it is some time since a new one has forced me to change patterns which I had already constructed. The distribution of the evidence used in this thesis is plotted on Map 1. There probably are gaps in my

coverage. For example, scholars devoting their attention to one specific region of Australia will certainly have a more detailed knowledge of the mortuary practices of that area than I have, as they will have had access to local documents and folk information that would be impossible for me to tap, because of the large area I am covering. Data of this kind can always be used at a later date to modify the general framework of mortuary practices that I have constructed.

Simple, Pseudo Compound and Compound Disposal

Mortuary practices in Australia, can roughly be divided into simple and compound procedures (see Thomas 1908, Roheim 1925, Davidson 1948a, Hiatt 1966, and Sprague 1968).

Simple disposal

Simple varieties occurred when corpses were disposed of by a single method, at one point in time. For example, in the Cape Riche district of Western Australia, the Aborigines dug a hole about four feet deep and placed the body in it, on its side, with the knees "cramped" up, and the face oriented towards the rising sun. The grave was filled with boughs, logs and earth. A semi-circular mound was constructed west of the grave, and fires were sometimes lit at the foot, or between the grave and the new camp (Bates n.d.: 32/11). Because these corpses were left in their graves, the disposals were of the simple variety. These will be discussed below in more detail in Chapters 1 to 4.

Compound disposal

Compound procedures occurred when corpses were treated with several disposal methods which took place at different times over periods ranging from several weeks to many years. In the Daly River-Darwin area of the Northern Territory, the Aborigines smeared red ochre over the corpse before placing it aloft (in a tree or on a platform). When all the soft parts had been removed from the skeleton by birds of prey and by natural processes, the relatives took the radius from the left arm and kept it. The remaining bones were wrapped in bark and buried (Basedow 1925: 208). In this example, the corpse was elevated until it was a skeleton, a period of months maybe, when the bones, with the exception of the left ulna, were buried. In other words, the corpse received two

but because these took place in a short time, I have treated them as simple disposals. I do, however, make special reference to them where it seems necessary for the sake of clarity.

The problem of pseudo compound disposals will not be satisfactorily solved, in my opinion, until an analysis of beliefs associated with death, has been carried out. Such a task was far beyond the scope of this thesis.

Organisation of Thesis

My thesis will be easier to follow if I briefly outline the way in which it is organised. It is presented in two volumes. Volume 1 contains the text plus figures, and Volume 2 all the tables, maps and plates. The text is divided into three parts. Part one deals with ethnographic evidence, Part 2 with archaeological evidence, and Part 3 the conclusions. Part 1 has two sections - one devoted to simple disposal, the other to compound disposal. The pseudo compound disposals are included with simple disposal, though they are sometimes referred to in the section on compound procedures.

Ethnographic evidence

Ethnographic evidence includes all those descriptions dating from the time of the first European contact, to the present day. The so-called "ethnographic present" occurred at different times in different places in Australia. It occurred about 1770 at Sydney in New South Wales, and is occurring in 1971 in some parts of the Northern Territory. This period spans about 200 years of European contact, and of course, mortuary practices have probably changed during that period, at a faster rate than they did previously. In some areas, especially where Christian missionaries had established themselves, burial became the normal method used for disposing of the dead. Where I have been able to detect such influences I have not used the data as diagnostic evidence, though I have noted it, as it may be of interest to those concerned with culture change. It should not be assumed that because one feature of a mortuary practice is changed, that the rest also changed. The modification may simply be fitted into an old pattern. For example, the people from the Blyth

River, in Arnhem Land, told Hiatt (1969: 18) that in the past they usually exposed corpses on tree platforms as a first step in a compound rite. Since the coming of the white man, corpses have been buried, and in many cases the procedure has gone on as before, with disinterment, hollow log coffins and all. Of course, some corpses are buried and never disinterred, but this probably also happened, to a lesser extent, in pre-European times.

Archaeological evidence

Part 2 deals with three kinds of archaeological data: recent, dated prehistoric and undated.

- (i) Recent archaeological evidence is the archaeological equivalent of the ethnographic material. The results of the recent archaeological and ethnographic sections will eventually be combined. Archaeological remains of events known to have taken place, but not seen are included here, as well as remains that are considered to have been of recent date because of the survival of some particular feature such as vegetable coverings, grave goods, earth works etc.
- (ii) Dated prehistoric evidence is a small but very important part of this thesis. It contains evidence for mortuary practices that has been collected from professionally-excavated sites. This is the only reliable evidence that can be used to extend ethnographic customs back into the past.
- (iii) The undated archaeological evidence is of little use except to indicate where certain types of evidence occurred throughout Australia. No time scale can be attached to such distributions.

Tables

A series of tables are included in Volume 2. These are referred to throughout the text in Volume 1. In general, each topic has a group of tables to go with it. The first one usually lists all the relevant references. The rest summarize information about particular features. In these tables, I have included all the references encountered, even where the material was obviously second hand. In the body of the thesis, where possible, I have emphasized the earliest and/or the most reliable. It was necessary at times to use material that was amateurish because it was the only data from a particular area. I have tried not to make this data

too important in the overall picture.

There were two reasons for compiling these tables. First, it was a way of making the evidence available for other people to interpret. Second, it enabled me to make general statements in the text by referring to a table for details, thus avoiding the presentation of too much data.

Maps

Also in Volume 2, a series of maps showing various distribution patterns, are presented. These maps are not meant to be specific replicas of lists of locations. They are designed to give an impression of distribution. To facilitate this, I have used quite large areas of shading where much smaller ones would have sufficed. Many places I was unable to locate, so in some cases, names that appear on a table may not be plotted on a map. In general, I plotted only reasonably specific locations, avoiding, unless it seemed crucial, vaguer descriptions of large areas.

Plates

A selection of plates are also included in Volume 2. Their use is straightforward, as they are referred to in the list of contents, and in the text.

Figures

A series of figures are interleaved with the text in Volume 1. These have been compiled to make the complexities of the mortuary practices easier to follow. They usually summarize what is in the text and on relevant maps.

Vocabulary

Most of the terms that needed special explanation or definition, have been dealt with as they occurred in the text. Some of the more important ones are mentioned here as well. *Burial* is used only to describe those instances where corpses were placed in holes in the ground and covered.* *Disposal* and *disposition* are both used as general terms for the procedures used to deal with corpses. Thus, they are used in the way that "burial" often is. Instead of saying that a corpse was buried in a tree, I would say that a corpse was disposed of in a tree, was given a tree disposal, or that people in a certain area practised disposition in trees. The reason for

using these words instead of "burial" was to avoid using terms that contained connotations of a particular procedure. No matter how carefully "burial" was used as a general term, it would still have overtones of corpses being deposited under the earth.

* "Grave" as in "grave goods" has been maintained. It refers to goods that were placed with any type of disposal.

PART 1: ETHNOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

SIMPLE DISPOSAL

In chapters 1 to 4, I examine the ethnographic evidence for simple disposal in Australia. The various kinds of simple disposal were:

Abandonment
Disposition on surface
Disposition in trees
Disposition on free-standing platforms
Disposition in caves
Cremation
Cannibalism
Disposition in water
Burial

All the references to simple disposal are plotted on Map 2. The custom occurs throughout the continent except for limited areas in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Cape York.

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, I discuss the ethnographic evidence for abandonment, and disposition on the surface, in trees, on free-standing platforms, in caves and in water. These dispositions are examined together not because they are in any way similar, but because the data concerning them is limited and when combined, they form a reasonably-sized section of the thesis. Separate chapters are devoted to cremation, cannibalism and burial because the amount of data available about these customs is copious enough to warrant such a separation.

ABANDONMENT

Abandon: "...forsake(a person...)" (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1951: 1)

Abandonment, as a form of simple disposal, occurred when corpses were left after a minimum of mortuary procedure. The sources referring to the practice of this custom are listed on Table 1.

Single Traits

The little evidence available for single traits associated with abandonment is summarized on Tables 1A - 1C. Table 1A indicates those people who were abandoned. In some areas it was the common form of disposal for everyone, in others only some people were abandoned - for example, the victims of an avenging party and people who had died from smallpox. Little attention was given to the preparation of corpses before they were abandoned. They were mostly laid out on the ground - see Table 1B. Grave goods were associated with some abandonments. They included things such as food, fire, water and weapons. All are listed on Table 1C. There is only one reference to the taking of a relic from an abandoned corpse (Robinson 1831: Dec. 15, 554).

DISPOSITION ON SURFACE

This type of disposal is like abandonment in that the corpse was left on the ground surface, but different from it because more trouble was taken with the disposal - for example, the corpse was covered. Such disposals could have occurred out in the open or on cave floors. In fact, all the references are to dispositions in the open. I had considerable difficulty interpreting the evidence for this custom. The wording used in the descriptions is often confusing. For example, does "buried" always mean that a corpse was placed in a hole in the ground and covered, or is it sometimes just a general word for disposal? Hence, Miller (in Newspaper Cuttings, 174: 17) says: "On the Hunter the *Wonnarua* buried under piles of logs". Does this mean that the corpse was put in a hole in the ground and covered with logs, or that it was left on the ground surface and covered with logs? The same question can be asked of the evidence from Turkey Creek in Western Australia, where old men were buried in the ground and "old women in rock shelters or under boulders". (Bates n.d.: 32/47). The only reasonably unambiguous case for surface disposal is recorded by Smyth (1878: I, 246-7) and describes an unusual occurrence. In brief, somewhere in the Gippsland area, some Dargo blacks speared some Omeo men. One of these was abandoned where he fell. Those who were killed in the camp were skinned and the skin was roasted and eaten. The camp was then pulled down on top of the remains.

Because of the ambiguity and meagreness of the evidence for surface disposals, it is best at this stage, merely to recognise the possibility that such a type did exist in Australia in historic times. Nothing can be said of its distribution - see Map 4 - and the archaeological implications are similar to those discussed for abandonment.

Mutilation

The mutilation of corpses is reported in several cases - see Table 3C. They were either burnt, skinned and eaten, had their limbs broken or their body openings sewn up. Most of these mutilations occurred as the first step in the pseudo compound disposals.

Wrapping and tying

Corpses were sometimes wrapped before they were deposited in trees. The main materials used for this purpose were bark or net, or occasionally, a crude bark coffin. In some instances this wrapping was also tied. The evidence for both customs is summarized on Table 3D. Tying of the unwrapped corpses also occurred though evidence for this is meagre - see Table 3E.

Position of corpse

The evidence for the position of the corpse is listed on Table 3F. They were dealt with in various ways including being arranged in either an upright posture, one of marked flexion, or one of contraction.

Orientation

As can be seen from Table 3G, the evidence for the orientation of the corpse, is inconclusive.

Preparation of tree

This evidence is organised on Table 3H. The preparation ranged from the cleaning out and subsequent lining of a hollow log or tree (Smyth 1878: I, 109), to the building of complicated structures in or attached to trees. A platform built wholly within a tree was constructed in the Port Phillip area of Victoria:

...They selected a strong if not lofty tree, and in the branches, about twelve feet up they placed some logs and branches across, and sheets of bark... (Buckley in Morgan 1852: 53).

Covering of corpses

In some cases, once the corpse had been placed in the tree, it was covered with one, or a combination of, the following items: bushes, bark, mats, cloth - see Table 3I.

Grave goods

Grave goods were sometimes associated with tree dispositions. As can be seen from Table 3J, the following items were used: spears, yam sticks, water dishes, implements of war and chase, and the deceased's possessions.

Fire

The one entry on Table 3K describes an occasion where a fire was lighted under the tree where a corpse had been placed (Eyre 1840-1: 345).

Relics

On Table 3L the relics taken from tree dispositions are listed. Some were collected at the time of the disposal, others were taken some time later. Those parts of the body removed included finger and toe bones, skulls, and bones.

Distribution

On Map 5 I have plotted all the references to disposition in trees without differentiating between the different types and including the ambiguous references as well. The distribution is scattered across northern Australia and concentrated in the eastern part of the continent, including Tasmania. On Map 6 I have plotted the occurrences of several types of tree disposition: in hollow trees and logs, in the branches of trees and on both kinds of platforms. This distribution excludes all those descriptions that were ambiguous. Disposition in hollow trees and logs occurs widely in eastern Australia from Brisbane in Queensland, through eastern New South Wales and into Victoria; it is present in southeastern Tasmania and there is one reference to its use in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Disposition in the branches of trees is scattered in its distribution, occurring in northwestern Australia, coastal Arnhem Land and southeastern Queensland. The use of platforms in, and attached to, trees has a widespread but sparse distribution. It is recorded for northwestern Australia, coastal Arnhem Land, some parts of Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. Thus, for coastal Northern Territory and southeastern Australia, three types of tree disposal have been recorded; for northwestern Australia two types, and for Tasmania, only one.

.....
Examples

The following examples give some idea of the nature and variation of disposition in trees throughout Australia. At port Essington in the Northern Territory:

When a native dies, he is wrapped up in the bark of a tree, and bound round with cord. A stage is made by placing two forked branches, eight or ten feet in height, upright in the ground, the forks uppermost, distant from each other five or six feet, and facing the fork of a tree. A piece of wood is placed transversely, resting on the forks of the upright branches. A number of branches are then placed longitudinally, the ends resting in the fork of the tree and on the transverse piece. The whole slopes at an angle, the uprights being shorter than the fork of the tree. This is done to prevent the lodgement of wet. Upon this inclined stage the body, wrapped in its coffin of bark, is laid; and there it remains... (Keppel 1835: 481).*

Some of the disposals from this area were of the pseudo compound variety in that a woman sometimes visited the place where her child had been placed and took away some of its bones - usually the skull - which she then carried around for several years (Keppel 1835: 482).

Partially initiated young men from the Broome and Beagle Bay area of Western Australia, were placed in a nest in a tree which was made from paperbark and wood. The corpse was then covered with bark. Two or three days later, the corpse's finger and toe bones were broken and eaten with honey after the marrow had been sucked from them. These bones were eventually worn in a forehead band or in a belt (Bates n.d.: 32/48-9).

In the upper Georgina River district of Queensland, corpses wrapped in nets, were placed on horizontal platforms of logs which were made in trees about ten to twelve feet from the ground. Sometimes possessions belonging to the dead people were placed amongst the sticks and bushes that were used to cover them (Roth 1897: 165).+

* See Plate 2

+ See Plate 3

In the northern part of the *Kamilaroi* country in northern New South Wales, corpses were placed in hollow trees if there was no soft ground available for a burial in the area close to the place of death (Howitt 1904: 466).

In South Australia the corpses of old women were sometimes placed in the forked branches of a tree (Angas 1850: 94).

The people who lived in the Delatite, Ovens, Broken and King Rivers region of Victoria put children's corpses into hollow branches. The branch was first cleared of rotten wood and lined with leaves and small twigs which were beaten down with a stiff piece of bark. Bark was then placed in it. The corpse, which was enclosed in a rude coffin, was then put in the hollow tree, more leaves were packed between it and the sides of the tree and finally, a bark lid was placed on top (Smyth 1878: I, 108).

In southeastern Tasmania, a Bruny Island native went to retrieve his erring wife who had returned to her country - that of the *Melukerdee*. When he arrived in the area he was speared by one of his wife's kinsmen who placed his corpse in a tree. Some time later the dead man's relatives found his remains and took away some of the bones to use as relics (Robinson 1834: Jun. 19, 887).

Archaeological implications

The main problem associated with the archaeological remains resulting from any of the tree disposals discussed above, is finding them in a state that would permit the reconstruction of the original form of the disposal. The preservation of such disposals depends largely upon their age and the environment in which they were placed. Wrappings, tyings, tree preparations, coverings, most grave goods and fires would soon disintegrate, and in many cases the bones would fall to the ground beneath the tree where they had originally been lodged, thus making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to associate those bones with any structure that may originally have held them. Dispositions in hollow logs and trees possess the best characteristics for survival because they enclose the corpse, but even these would eventually disintegrate and fall apart, leaving little evidence of their past form. Relics taken from these disposals could be found in the possession of Aborigines and probably also in archaeological deposits where they had been left or lost after they had outgrown their usefulness.

DISPOSITION ON FREE-STANDING PLATFORMS

A free-standing platform was constructed from various kinds of bush timber and was in no way attached to a tree. I separated this type of disposal from those in which corpses were placed on platforms attached to trees, even though the two types were probably related. The main reason for making the division, was that free-standing platforms were reported from areas where trees were available. The fact that the Aborigines chose to make free-standing platforms in that situation, suggests that the construction represented a slightly different cultural idea.

I included in this section all those references that stated explicitly that free-standing platforms were used for disposals, as well as those which said that platforms were used. The latter entries gave no indication that the structures were in any way attached to trees.

In some cases it was not clear whether the event being described was a simple disposal or one part of a compound procedure. For example, Birtles (1922: 171) recorded an incident whereby a woman's corpse was rolled in paper bark and taken to a ti-tree swamp, where it was placed on a bough platform about five feet high. The only location given for this event is the Northern Territory and as that area is one where compound disposals were common, this description could represent the first step in such a procedure.

The evidence for disposition on free-standing platforms is summarized on Tables 4 - 4E.

Single traits

In Tables 4A - 4E, I discuss who was disposed of in this way, the preparation of the corpse, descriptions of the platforms, the coverings used for the corpses and fires that were used in association with the disposals.

The quantity of evidence available on this topic is limited and as the tables are largely self-explanatory I will not discuss each trait separately.

Distribution

The occurrence of disposition on free-standing platforms can be seen on Map 7. It is present in northwestern Western Australia and occurs sporadically along the eastern and southern coasts of the continent. It has not been reported for Tasmania.

Examples

The following descriptions will give some idea of the form and variation of this custom throughout the area of distribution.

Schmidt (in Lang 1847: 432) reported a disposal that took place at Moreton Bay in Queensland:

...a man who had died of venereal disease, was wrapped up in tea-tree bark, and, after being brought to a solitary spot, was put on a framework, erected for the purpose about eight or nine feet high; the place underneath was carefully cleared and a large fire made close by.

In Western Australia, in the vicinity of Port Headland, platform exposure was practised in its simplest form (Davidson 1948a: 79). It was reserved for medicine men and honoured hunters. Only in some cases were the skeletal remains collected after a time and kept by relatives. Thus, in this area, platform disposals were sometimes simple in form and sometimes the first part of a compound procedure.

The people who lived around the lakes in the Coorong area of South Australia, raised their dead upon elevated platforms and covered them with rushes, netting, and basket work of grass.* Some illustrations of these disposals (Angas 1847: Plate XL) are archaeological and will be discussed later in the relevant section. In his 1850 publication, Angas (94) says that, in South Australia, favourite children were put in bags after death and placed on elevated scaffolds, two or three frequently being enclosed beneath the same covering.

* See Plate 4

Eyre's description (1840-1: 345-6) of a disposal on a free-standing platform is slightly ambiguous in that it could be the first and drying procedure of a compound disposal:

Another method practised around Lake Alexandrina, is to construct a platform, or bier upon high poles of pine, put upright in the ground upon which the body is placed, bandages being first put round the forehead, and over the eyes, and tied behind. A bone is stuck through the nose, the fingers are folded in the palm of the hand, and the fist is tied with nets, the ends of which are fastened about a yard from the hands; the legs are put crossing each other.

The natives lamented around the body and fires were made below the platform for some time until the body was dry. This could be an unfinished version of Angas's description (1847: XL, 2) which is certainly a compound disposal.*

Thomas (1906: 197) reports that the Adelaide tribe placed their dead on a bier which was constructed of ten or twelve branches arranged like the hub of a wheel. This was rested against a tree and, presumably, left there.

The only reference I have found describing the disposal of the dead on a free-standing platform from New South Wales occurs in Flanagan (1888: 88). He says, and I think he was writing about the Sydney area, that "the young were sometimes wrapped in bark and put on a raised hurdle or across the limbs of a tree".

For Victoria, as for elsewhere, the evidence is thin: Smyth (1878: I, 99) says that the tribes of northern Victoria sometimes wrapped corpses in rugs or mats and put them on platforms.

Archaeological implications

There is little chance that a recognisable disposition on a free-standing platform will be found archaeologically, other than in recent archaeological form, for the platform would decay and the skeleton would fall to the ground below. Post holes, if used in the original construction, might be found if the area around the skeleton was carefully excavated, but the chances of finding them, and of relating them to the bones, would be remote.

* See Plate 5

DISPOSITION IN CAVES

In this section I discuss all kinds of simple disposal that occurred in caves. I use "cave" as a short hand term for caves and rock shelters, and for rocky areas in general. In theory, disposition in caves could include abandonment, surface disposition, disposition on free-standing platforms, the placing therein of cremated remains or the remains of cannibalistic meals, and burial. In other words, nearly every type of simple disposal could have taken place in a cave. In point of fact, there are few descriptions of any disposals said to have occurred in caves. The reason for this lack of evidence could be either that the Aborigines did not dispose of their dead in caves, or that the early European observers did not find themselves in a position to observe such dispositions. It will be clear from the archaeological evidence presented below that Aborigines, at various times in the past, certainly did use caves as receptacles for their dead, so it seems reasonable to assume that the lack of ethnographic evidence for the custom is due to the vagaries of observation.

The evidence for disposition in caves is summarized on Tables 5 - 5E. Table 5 lists all the references to it.

Single Traits

Tables 5A - 5E summarize the small amount of data available on various aspects of dispositions in caves. They cover the identification of corpses, pseudo compound disposals, mutilation, wrapping and relics, respectively. As the tables are largely self-explanatory, I will not discuss each trait in detail.

Distribution

The occurrence of disposition in caves is plotted on Map 8. It is reported for northwestern Australia, southwestern Northern Territory, Cape York, South Australia and Victoria.

Examples

The following descriptions give some idea of the various forms this custom took throughout its area of distribution. In some parts of Central Australia the dead were placed in small caves or cavities in stony ranges. This was also done by tribes who lived to the west of the Overland Telegraph Line, in the Tomkinson Ranges in northwestern South Australia and away towards the Ord River in northeastern Western Australia (Newspaper Cuttings 1906: 6, 152).

At Ruby Creek in the Kimberleys, male corpses were wrapped in bark and placed on ledges in caves (Mathews 1899: 124). In Collier Bay, the corpses of women were eaten and the remains buried or placed in rocky holes or crevices (Davidson 1948a: 78). At Port Headland, the bodies of honoured individuals were sometimes placed in holes or rocks, without first being exposed on a platform (Davidson 1948a: 79). Bates (n.d.: 32/43) says that in the Pilbara region some corpses were buried, but others were placed in rock shelters until they had become skeletonized when relatives took away several of the smaller bones which they carried for some time. At Turkey Creek, the corpses of old women were put in rock shelters or underneath boulders (Bates n.d.: 32/47). All the locations mentioned in this paragraph are in Western Australia.

In northern Victoria some groups deposited their dead, or their dead hunters, in caves (Smyth 1878: I, 99). On the Lower Murray River, presumably in South Australia, corpses were sometimes "buried" in caves (Bulmer 1888: 22).

Those cases in which it was unclear whether corpses were buried in cave floors or merely deposited upon them, I have included in the burial section as well as in this one.

Archaeological implications

It seems likely that corpses and other things associated with their disposals, such as wrappings and tyings, would survive longer in a protected cave environment than they would out in the open. Militating against preservation is the use of caves by animals and the tendency of Aborigines to disturb the floors to make their camps more comfortable. Another hazard is the zeal of the amateur collector who has learned that caves are reliable places in which to find artefacts and skeletal remains. Thus, such deposits often end up containing more pits than those made in the prehistoric past.

DISPOSITION IN WATER

All the references listed on Table 8 describe disposals associated with water: a waterhole, the sea and a stream. They have been plotted on Map 9.

Crouch (n.d.: 24) says that when an Aborigine was killed by someone from another tribe, his body was deposited in a waterhole or in the bottom of a stream bed. It was prevented from rising to the surface either by a spear that was driven through it or by a heavy log which was placed upon it. Crouch's reference, as far as I can find out, is a general one for Australia, though the other descriptions in his document are of Victorian customs.

Some of the inhabitants of the smaller islands in the vicinity of Broadsound in Queensland are said to have taken their dead out to sea in a canoe where they were thrown overboard (Flower in Roth 1907: 398).

Smyth (1878: I, 99) records that some of the tribes from northern Victoria placed their corpses in running streams

CHAPTER 2CREMATION

Cremate: consume (esp. corpse) by fire (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1951: 282)

On Table 6 I have listed all references to the practice of cremation in Australia in historic times. This includes references to cremation as simple disposal, as pseudo compound disposal, and as the first step in compound disposal. The simple and pseudo compound varieties will be discussed in detail in this chapter, but cremation associated with the more complex disposals will be dealt with below in the section devoted exclusively to compound disposal.

The pseudo compound disposals have been summarized on Table 6B. One group comprising two procedures, all began with cremation. Within a day or so of the incineration, the remains were either buried, arranged on the surface beneath a mound, placed in a hollow tree, pulverised and scattered, used as a mourning cosmetic, carried as an amulet or charm, or worn as an ornament. The remaining disposals consisted of either cannibalism followed by cremation, retention followed by cremation, or partial cremation followed by disposition in a hollow tree until some of the bones were retrieved by relatives.

Because I believe that pseudo compound disposal is basically a special kind of simple disposal, I have treated both lots of data as one.

Single traits

On Tables 6A, 6C - 6H some characteristics of the simple and pseudo compound disposals are summarized. I will discuss each trait separately.

Who were cremated?

Table 6A lists the people who were cremated. In certain parts of Tasmania: the southeast, the south, the west and the northwest, cremation was the major form of disposal; most people in these areas were burnt after death. This was not the case elsewhere in Tasmania, nor on the mainland.

At Portland Bay in Victoria, in northern Victoria, and at Mount Remarkable in South Australia, "the dead" were cremated (Angas 1850: 97, Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17, and Taplin 1879: 65 respectively).

At Kew and Geelong in Victoria, if there was no time to dig a grave, corpses were cremated; married women and victims of senilicide were cremated in any case (Berndt 1964: 398). At Port Fairy, also in Victoria, if there was no time to dig a grave, or if the ground was too hard, corpses were cremated. Victims of senilicide and infanticide, married women and children under the age of four, were also cremated (Dawson 1881: 62-3). On the Delatite, Ovens, Broken and King Rivers, again in Victoria, married people and warriors were cremated (Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17).

In the Encounter Bay area of South Australia, stillborn children, children who died shortly after birth, children who died in their infancy, and victims of infanticide, were cremated (Davidson 1948a: 75-6).

The New South Wales evidence, which comes exclusively from the Sydney area, suggests that 'those passed middle-age' were cremated (e.g. Collins 1798: 601), though a few references state that 'the dead' were burnt (e.g. Banks 1789-96: 36). Two accounts of cremation occur in Collins (1798). In the first case (601-2) *Bennilong's* first wife, *Ba-rang-a-rr Da-ring-ha*, was burnt; she was probably 'passed middle-age'. In the second case (Collins 1798: Plate opposite p.8), the man cremated was probably mature because his spear and throwing stick were burnt with him. Because there is no more diagnostic evidence from New South Wales, the question of the identity of people cremated there, is best left unanswered at this stage. Archaeological evidence may one day provide additional information.

In Queensland, several references say that either 'the dead' or 'some dead' were cremated (e.g. Curr 1886: II, 330-2 and 408 and Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17). In the Natal Downs - Cape River district, boys, women and girls were burnt (Curr 1886: II, 476) but on the main range between the Belyando and Cape Rivers, and in the district enclosed by Natal, Elgin and Bowen Downs, and Tower Hill, old women were disposed of in this way (Curr 1886: III, 22). On the Belyando River women who died naturally or were killed were cremated (Curr 1886: III, 29) while at Maryborough men were cremated, and at Moreton Bay, old men and women were (Lang 1847: 428).

Preparation of the corpse

The evidence for the preparation of corpses before incineration is summarized on Table 6C.

Some corpses from Tasmania, were arranged and sometimes tied as well, into specific positions before they were cremated. One corpse was burnt on Bruny Island in southeastern Tasmania, in a sitting position (Robinson 1829: May 18, 59). Another, from West Hunter or Barren Island off the northwest coast of the island, received a complicated positioning and tying before it was burnt (Robinson 1832: Jul. 30, 637). Evidence for the orientation of the corpse before incineration is inconclusive (see Robinson 1831: April 30, 347; 1832: Jul. 30, 636-7 and Sept. 15, 658).

Evidence for the preparation of corpses before incineration from Victoria and South Australia is meagre, especially from the latter. In the Portland Bay area of Victoria and in southeastern South Australia, corpses were placed in an erect position (Angas 1850: 97). The rest of the evidence comes from Victoria. At Port Fairy corpses faced east (Dawson 1881: 63), and in the Port Phillip region they were merely "thrown" on pyres (Buckley in Morgan 1852: 32-3). At Kew and Geelong senilicide victims, who had been strangled, were burnt (Berndt 1964: 398). The latter custom was also practised at Port Fairy (Dawson 1881: 62) where in addition, on some occasions, corpses were mutilated or partly eaten before they were burnt (Dawson 1881: 67).

In New South Wales corpses had their heads placed to the north and were covered with old blankets (Collins 1798: 605, 608) while Angas (1850: 227) and Kittle (1815?: 219-20) state that corpses faced the rising sun. These two statements are not incompatible for a corpse could have its head to the north and its face to the east.

In Queensland on the Cloncurry River, corpses had their viscera removed and the rest cooked and eaten, before they were burnt (Curr 1886: II, 330-2). On the lower Tully River, the flat of the hands were placed in a close position either pressed close to one side of the head or between the shins; the corpse was tied in that position (Roth 1907: 387).

Preparation for incineration

The preparation made for cremation, excluding that specifically related to the corpse, usually entailed the construction of a pyre of some kind, though in a few cases corpses were incinerated in hollow trees. Such preparations are summarized on Table 6D.

The best information about the construction of pyres comes from Tasmanian sources. Robinson's description of a cremation from West Hunter or Barren Island, is extremely detailed and, fortunately, one of his unpublished drawings illustrates it in a charmingly primitive way:

...Having procured some short billets of wood about four feet in length, they began to build the pile in the form of a square, lapping the ends together at the angles thus #, and raised it to the height of about three feet. They then collected some dry fern and grass and small sticks and thrust them into the immediate space until it was filled to the top, after which they collected some long brushwood and placed it on end all round the pyre to the height of ten feet, leaving an aperture for the body to be put on...the body on the pyre in a sitting position, with face towards east. Under each arm was placed dry brushwood and the body was then enclosed, the funeral pile being completed in a circular form. The whole was bound together with a grass band which the natives made by tying the grass together (Robinson 1832: Jul. 30, 637).*

In South Australia and Victoria, some corpses were burnt in hollow trees (Angas 1850: 97) while others were incinerated on a more conventional pyre. For example, on the Delatite, Ovens, Broken and King Rivers in Northern Victoria a:

Pile of dry branches, logs and brushwood three feet high, three feet wide and six to seven feet long was constructed. The corpse was put on this and covered with green boughs until the pile was five feet high. (Smyth 1878: I, 108-9).

Pyre construction in New South Wales is well-described by Collins (1798: 605) and illustrated by his etching.

* Plate 6

The man had his spear and throwing stick cremated with him.

The only evidence from Queensland suggests that, between the Maranoa and Paroo Rivers, objects belonging to dead people were cremated with them (Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17).

Procedure after cremation

A knowledge of the procedures that followed the incineration of corpses is useful, because it provides some idea as to where, and in what form, the remains might be found. These have been summarized on Table 6G.

In Tasmania, generally speaking, the products of a cremation were either collected together and made into a mound which was sometimes covered with grass and sticks (Robinson 1829: May 31, 62 and 1832: Jul. 31, 638), placed in skin bags and carried as amulets (Backhouse 1843: 105, Robinson 1832: Aug. 1, 638-9), or used as a mourning cosmetic and medicines (Backhouse 1843: 105).

The manufacture of an amulet has been described by Robinson (1829: Jul. 9, 225, footnote 4):

In the course of my rounds this day and whilst passing through the sombre domain of the dead, I observed a native woman where a corpse of a male aboriginal had been burnt, clearing away the debris until nothing remained but the very finest of ashes. I was not prepared for this and yet it was evident she had a purpose. Whilst I was thus reflecting I observed she went to her basket and took two circular pieces of kangaroo skin about thirteen inches in diameter having holes perforated on the outer edge, and laid them on the ground; and on these she placed the ashes and then took a cord made of the sinews of the kangaroo tail, passing it through the holes, and drew the parts together, with the fur turned inwards, until the ashes were covered up. It was then tightly laced until the whole was reduced to six inches in diameter and two or two and a half inches in thickness. One of these amulets she gave to her invalid husband, and the other she kept.*

* See enclosed article, Plate V

At Port Phillip in Victoria, the cremated remains of corpses were either pulverised and scattered (Dawson 1881: 63), or pounded, put in a small opossum-skin bag, carried, and finally burnt (Dawson 1881: 63). On the Delatite, Ovens, Broken and King Rivers, in northern Victoria, burnt remains were put in hollow trees (Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17), while a description from the Port Phillip region of southern Victoria, indicates that the remains were raked together before a digging stick was placed on the mound thus formed (Buckley in Morgan 1852: 32-3).

In the Sydney area of New South Wales, ashes were made into a mound and covered with bark and logs (Collins 1798: 606, 608). Hunter's description says that the briefly-burnt corpse was buried immediately after it had been exposed to the flames (1793: 412).

In Queensland, after some cremations, the ashes were buried (Curr 1886: III, 22). In others, relics were gathered from the debris (Roth 1907: 389). On Great Sandy or Fraser Island, the ashes were sometimes carried (Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17).

Relics

On Table 6H I have listed those things that were kept as relics, usually by relatives of the deceased, after a cremation had taken place. Some of these relics have already been mentioned in the discussion above, and as the table is largely self-explanatory, I will not discuss the matter any further.

Distribution

I have already discussed, in detail, the distribution of cremation in Australia in Hiatt (1970) which is included at the back of this thesis, and I discuss it again in my conclusion. Suffice it to say here that it had a decidedly eastern distribution with concentration in the northeast and southeast of that region. Some areas between its occurrence in Queensland and Victoria-Tasmania appear to lack the custom. The distribution can be seen on Map 10 - pseudo compound disposals, and Map 11 - simple disposals. The pseudo compound distribution falls entirely within that for simple disposals. One disposal from Arnhem Land (Hiatt 1969: 18) I have listed as pseudo compound, but, to be honest, I am not sure what kind of disposal it is. It will be discussed in detail, in the section on compound disposal.

Berndt (1964: 398) says that, in the area around Kew and Geelong, corpses were burned when either there was no time to dig a grave, or when the corpse was a married woman or a victim of senilicide. At Portland Bay, as well as in the extreme southeast of South Australia, the dead were placed, in an erect position, in a hollow tree, covered with leaves and dry sticks, and burnt (Angas 1850: 97). Buckley (in Morgan 1852: 32-3), who roamed in the Port Phillip area, was present when a woman died from a spear wound. A large fire was made and her body thrown upon it. Wood was added to the fire until the corpse had been reduced to ashes when the embers of the fire were then raked together and the deceased's digging stick stuck in the top of the mound.

Dawson has recorded several cremation practices for the Port Fairy district. I will summarize several of them in this paragraph. Senilicide victims were cremated after they had been strangled (1881: 62). If a person of common rank died under ordinary circumstances, and there was no time to dig a grave, the corpse was placed on a bier and taken one or two miles from the camp. It was there placed on a funeral pile with its head to the east, accompanied by all its "effects", with the exception of axes, and cremated. The next day the remaining bones were pulverised and scattered about (63). When a married woman died she was cremated. Her husband put her calcined bones into a small opossum-skin bag and carried them until he re-married or until the bag was worn out (63). Finally, the corpses belonging to children under four years of age and those who had been killed by their parents were burnt (63).

Tasmania

The best evidence, both in quality and quantity, for cremation comes from Tasmania. Fortunately, Robinson spent the years between 1829 and 1834 making several treks around the island in an effort to round up the remnants of the Tasmanian Aborigines and take them to a government settlement. During these trips he saw many Aborigines die and their corpses disposed of. Many of the disposals were by cremation. One of the most informative descriptions is recorded in the journal he kept during his stay on Bruny Island in 1829:

The sick aborigine Joe requested a fire outside his hut, to which he was anxious to be carried. He did not survive long. I was busy in my hut when the groans of this man ceased, and with them the noise of the other natives...A solemn stillness prevailed. My apprehensions became excited. I went out. He had just expired. The natives were seated around their fire and some were employed in twisting grass. They then bent the legs back against the thighs and bound them tight round with twisted grass. Each arm was bent together and bound round above the elbow. A funeral pile was then made by placing a quantity of dry wood at the bottom, upon which they laid some dry bark. They then placed more wood raising it to about two feet six inches above the ground. A quantity of dry bark was then laid upon the top upon which they placed the corpse, arching the whole over with dry wood. The men and women assisted in kindling the fire, after which they left the fire and did not approach the spot anymore that day. Next morning I went to see the remains and found one of the dogs eating a part unconsumed. The remains were then collected and burnt...After the body was burnt the ashes were scraped together and a quantity of grass and sticks laid over them. (May 31, 61).

A variation in the Tasmanian procedure occurred when a corpse was burnt and the ashes were collected as an amulet or charm. Such a procedure was observed by Backhouse while he was visiting West Hunter or Barren Island, off the northwest corner of Tasmania:

Lately, several of these people were sick upon the West Hunter or Barren Island, and one of the women died. The men formed a pile of logs, and at sunset, placed the body of the woman upon it, supported by small wood, which concealed her, and formed a pyramid. Then they placed their sick people around the pile at a short distance. On A. Cottrel,

our informant, enquiring the reason of this, they told him that the dead woman would come in the night and take the devil out of them. At daybreak the pile was set on fire, and fresh wood added as any part of the body became exposed till the whole was consumed. The ashes of the dead were collected in a piece of kangaroo-skin and every morning, before sunrise, till they were consumed, a portion of them was smeared over the faces of the survivors, and a death song sung, with great emotion, tears clearing away lines among the ashes. The store of ashes in the meantime, was suspended around their necks. (1843: 105).

Archaeological Implications

Corpses that were reduced to ashes have probably been lost to the archaeologist, unless they were placed in a bag and kept as a relic. They might then be found in caves or in living deposits, and may survive well enough for their original form to be reconstructed, especially by a scholar well-versed in the ethnography of the area. Cremations that consisted of a collection of calcined bones possess greater possibilities for survival. This material could be found as part of the débris in living deposits, or as discrete structures. Unfortunately, the chances of finding such a structure are remote, as these rarely took place in living areas.

It was practised in two forms - mortuary and homicidal. Mortuary cannibalism occurred only after an individual had died from natural or accidental causes, or from injuries received during hostilities not primarily associated with cannibalism; it also took two forms - token and total. Token mortuary cannibalism entailed the consumption of only a small or particular part of the corpse - for example, fingers, toes, kidney fat, skin and hands, fat, body juices. Total mortuary cannibalism occurred when most or all of the body was eaten.

Homicidal cannibalism took place when individuals were killed specifically to be eaten. This type of cannibalism is not well-documented for Australia, but this is not surprising because such information would necessarily entail the admission of murder.

All references to the practice of cannibalism in Australia in historic times are listed on Table 7. This data was difficult to deal with mainly because of the topic, but also because of the variation in its quality, quantity and completeness. However, I tried to organise it in such a way that the maximum amount of information could be derived from it. First of all, the entries were classified under Kind, in the fourth column, as either M, H, N or P. M indicates that the cannibalism was of the mortuary variety, H that it was homicidal; N that it was not practised. P entries indicate that cannibalism was practised but they do not specify whether it was mortuary or homicidal in form.

In the fifth column, namely that of Type, some entries were classified in another way. The new divisions were S, PC, C and UM. S indicates that mortuary cannibalism was incorporated into a simple disposal; P that it was part of a pseudo compound disposal; and C that it was one aspect of a compound procedure. The UM refers to mortuary cannibalism that could not be classified as one of the disposal types. The compound disposals with cannibalism are discussed below in the section that deals with compound procedures.

Table 7A contains all the mortuary cannibalism entries that did not contain enough information to allow them to be classified as part of a simple, pseudo compound or compound disposal. In column two the people who were eaten are listed.

were fed and looked after until base camp was reached, when they were killed by being struck on the back of the neck with a tomahawk. This flesh was eaten by married men and chiefs only - single men, women and children did not participate in the feast (Thomas n.d.: Vol. 21, 220). The people who lived east of Boundary Dam in Western Australia ate fat men, women and girls. They cooked them by making a deep hole in the sand, trussing the body and there roasting it. Some groups in the same area cut off the hand and foot and ate those first (Bates 1938: 122). When Europeans first arrived in the Beltana area of South Australia, the local Aborigines were in the habit of killing their relatives who were dying. The fat and choice portions of their flesh were cooked and eaten (Curr 1886: II, 119). In the Carnarvon area of Western Australia, certain types of lawbreakers were killed and eaten. In one incident, a man and a girl who did not stand in the proper marriage relationship eloped. A posse was formed to follow them. The man was overtaken and speared, after which he was roasted and eaten (Davidson 1948a: 77-8).

The most interesting feature of the data contained in the third column is that in many cases the children killed to be eaten were despatched by their own mothers.

Those who ate human flesh are listed in the fourth column. In general they were the same people who carried out the killing. An exception is recorded from Yuria Waters in South Australia, where when small boys showed signs of weakness, one of their baby siblings was killed and cooked. The fat was rubbed over the weaklings and they ate flesh every morning and evening until it was finished (Bates 1938: 159). In Cue in Western Australia, if an old man was believed to be dying, he was sometimes fed a roasted child to give him spiritual strength (Davidson 1948a: 77).

Information about how the corpses were prepared, what part of them was eaten, and the circumstances in which homicidal cannibalism was indulged in, is summarized in the fifth column. For example, human flesh was eaten during prolonged drought periods, when people were really hungry, and during vegetable eating seasons. Parts eaten included blood, kidney fat, fat and 'tibits'.

Preparation of corpse up to time of eating

Table 7H summarizes the preparation of the corpse up to the time it was eaten. This preparation includes references to elevation, tying, wrapping and covering as well as to acts of mutilation such as evisceration, bone breaking, skinning, cooking and butchering. On the Cloncurry River in Queensland, corpses were eviscerated and hot stones placed in the body cavity, before they were cooked in a trench (Curr 1886: II, 331-2). Immediately after death, adults from the Brisbane area of Queensland, had certain parts of their genitalia removed. Their corpses were then skinned. This process was a complicated procedure, and as it is well-described by Roth (1907: 399-400) I will quote it at length:

...When a big fire had been made, the body was laid face downwards on a large sheet of tea-tree bark lying alongside...One "medicine man" now took the sapwood of an old tree, a piece about a foot long and three or four inches wide, got it well-lighted, removed the burning cinders, and while still glowing, applied it all over the corpse, except the head, thus singeing off every vestige of hair (except of course that of the scalp hair and beard) and causing the flesh to turn a kind of light brown colour; he then rubbed the whole body over with his hand, thus removing all the burnt shreds of outer skin and hair particles...If the corpse was that of a male, it lay on its stomach. The newcomer after making a median incision right through the skin from top of head, along the neck, right down the middle of the back as far as the anus...the second "medicine man" would advance in a similar fashion and incise, from the median cut just made, across the shoulders down the middle of the backs of the arm, fore-arm, and hand as far as the knuckles, and similarly retire; he would be succeeded by a third doctor who cut from the extremity of the median incision, down along the middle of the buttock, and back of each thigh, leg and heel. If the corpse was that of a female, it lay on its back, the three incisions being correspondingly made on the front: median, from the top of the head right down through the middle of the nose and face, down the

neck, chest, and belly as far as the fork: the second from the neck down to the fronts of the extremities as far as the tip of the palms: the third, from the fork down the fronts of the thighs and legs as far as the insteps. Two of the doctors next commenced to get off the skin along these incisions, removing it in one piece with attached toes, fingers, ears etc., and then to stick it up on spears to dry before the fire.

When the skinning was complete, the entrails, heart and lungs were removed, the body was cut up, carefully disjointed, then roasted.

Preparations not directly associated with the corpse

This data has been summarized on Table 7I. It refers to the preparation of structures in trees, graves, cooking facilities, biers and pieces of bark, and fires, before the corpse was actually eaten. For example, the natives from the Mary River in Queensland, placed the corpse on a sheet of bark slung across a couple of saplings, and carried it to where the major procedures were to be carried out. At that spot a fire was lit on either side, and about six feet away from, the corpse. A good supply of bark was collected and placed near the fires (McDonald 1870: 215).

On one occasion, some people from the Port Phillip district of Victoria, heated stones in a fire, ready to cook some human remains (Buckley in Morgan 1852: 91-2).

Procedure after feast

The procedures carried out after cannibalistic meals are summarized on Table 7J. They took simple and complex forms. The simple forms occurred when the remains of meals were either buried, cremated, elevated, given a surface disposition, or retained as relics. The complex forms included the following combinations: burial and relic retention, cremation and relic retention, and burial, cremation and relic retention. Relics are discussed in the following section so I will not go into their details here.

suspended. The portion removed was roasted between heated stones, then eaten. The knee-caps were cleaned, tied in a net of hair and bark, and carried by the mother around her neck.

South Australia

All the evidence from South Australia is simple disposal, and all except one reference (Horne and Aiston 1924: 154-5) refers to the practices of the *Dieri* from the Cooper's Creek area. Horne and Aiston say that the Blinman Aborigines swallowed lumps of the liver of the dead, the mother eating of the child, and vice versa. The corpses were then buried, the burials surmounted by stones and earth and grave goods placed upon them. If the deceased had been a female, a hut was made at the head of the grave and her digging stick and other goods were placed upon it.

After *Dieri* people died, their big toes were tied together. The corpses were then wrapped in rugs and placed in graves on, and covered by, a plant called *kuya-marra*. At this stage old men climbed into the graves and cut from the corpses all the fat adhering to their faces, thighs, arms and stomachs. This was swallowed by relatives. Finally the graves were filled in and large stacks of wood erected upon them (James, in Howitt 1904: 448-9).

Western Australia

In the Collier Bay area, after certain parts of female corpses had been eaten, the remains, with the trunks on their sides, were placed in graves and covered with stones (Davidson 1948a: 78).

Young men who had been partly initiated and young girls, from the Broome and Beagle Bay area, were placed in a tree on a structure made from paperbark and wood. Two or three days later their fingers and toes were broken and, after the marrow had been sucked from the fingers, all were mixed with honey and eaten. The bones were made into an ornament and worn. Sometimes the legs were also broken so that the marrow could be extracted in the same way (Bates n.d.: 32/48).

McDonald saw the flesh being roasted and soon after two holes, lined with grass, being dug on two sides of the fire. He was told that the flesh was to be put into these holes and covered with a large fire, but the women denied that they intended to eat it. After such careful preparation this seems an unlikely story, especially as they admitted that they had eaten human flesh in the past. Unfortunately, we are not told what happened to the bones. Presumably the skins were kept for some time after this event.

Archaeological Implications

Many features of simple and pseudo compound disposals which incorporated some cannibalistic procedures, should be detectable in the archaeological record. This is particularly true of corpses which had been butchered and/or cooked. Those cases where remains were cremated after a cannibalistic meal may be difficult to separate from simple cremations. It should be possible, however, to decide whether or not a corpse had been fleshed at the time of incineration (Thorne: pers. comm.).

to each region. Thus, the examination of the nature and distribution of the single traits, may help to create a typology and distribution of the custom as a whole.

Who was buried?

On Table 9B are listed those people who were buried. The table contains several kinds of data: including references to specific individuals and categories of people, and descriptions of circumstances in which people were buried. Among the people who lived on the western shore of Spencer Gulf in South Australia, the dead were buried (Angas 1850: 111). In the Capel district of Western Australia, a man's wife - *Nembuk* - was buried (Bates n.d.: 32/17). Old women and wittols of long standing were buried in the area of the rivers and creeks near Moama and Wentworth in southeastern Australia (Beveridge 1883: 30). The people who lived between Hann's and Davenport Ranges in the Northern Territory, buried old men who had become too feeble to conduct the ceremonies for which they had been caretakers (Spencer and Gillen 1904: 506).

On Map 16 I have plotted the age of the people who were buried, having divided the populations into adults, children, infants and old people. Men and women are classified as adults. Apart from the preponderance of adults, the map tells little. In the southeast, southwest and northwest of Australia some adults, children, infants and old people were buried. In the northeast, only adults, children and old people were placed in graves; the same is true for the central portion of the continent.

The sex of people buried is plotted on Map 17. There is a fairly even distribution of males and females throughout the region with perhaps a slight concentration of males in southwestern Australia, and in Victoria.

When simple burials are found archaeologically, it should be possible to age and sex the skeletons, depending on the condition of the bone. Archaeology is capable of providing more reliable and precise information about the age and sex of the people who were buried, than can be culled from the information presented above. Some facts must be gleaned from the ethnography however, such as certain kinds

of circumstances in which burials took place. For example, men who had bad reputations as adulterers (Meggitt 1962: 322), and young and old men who died during festivities (Bates n.d. 32/26), were buried in Western Australia and the Northern Territory respectively. Such knowledge is truly anthropological and could never be interpreted from an archaeological situation.

Mutilation etc.

On Table 9C, all those things that were done to the body before it was buried, are summarized. These included burning, cannibalism, decoration, depilation, bone breaking, nail burning, disembowelling, removal of body parts, and mutilation inflicted by jumping on corpses, or by dropping stones on them.

The Aborigines from the Sydney area of New South Wales, put their dead for some time in a fire before they laid them in a grave (Hunter 1793: 412). At the source of the Mary River in Queensland, the *Kabi* tribe ate the flesh from their dead before they buried them (Mathew, in Newspaper Cuttings 174: 17). In southern Western Australia, red ochre was put on the cheeks, foreheads and noses of corpses (Bates n.d.: 32/97?). A man had his hair and beard cut off before he was buried, at Hanson Creek in the Northern Territory (Chewings 1936: 128). On the coast of Western Australia, in the vicinity of Bremer Bay, an old man, *Winmar*, died. His arm, leg and thigh bones were broken with a throwing stick before he was buried (Hassel 1936: 708).

In the Williams district of Western Australia, corpses had the nails from the finger and thumb of their spear hand burnt off before they were buried (Bates n.d.: 32/10). Before middle-aged men were buried on the Murray River in southeastern Australia, an eight inch cut was made in their stomachs, the entrails and peritoneum were pulled out, and carefully examined. A portion of the omentum was cut off and kept, then the entrails were replaced with a handful of green leaves (Eyre 1840-1: 348). At Rockhampton and Broad-sound in Queensland, a mother retained one or both of the dried hands belonging to her deceased infant for some time after the rest of it had been buried (Roth 1907: 398).

was restricted to southwestern Western Australia. In Cape York, New South Wales and the Murray River in southeastern Australia, corpses were disembowelled. Taking of body parts has been recorded for Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. Jumping on corpses was described for Western Australia and the Murray River in southeastern Australia. The use of a stone was reported from the Sydney area of New South Wales. Butchering that did not fit into any of the other categories, occurred in Cape York and Tasmania.

Thus, Western Australia had evidence for the practice of cannibalism, decoration, depilation, bone breaking, nail burning, removal of body parts and mutilations inflicted by jumping on corpses. Cannibalism and depilation were reported from the Northern Territory. In Queensland there was burning, cannibalism, bone breaking, disembowelling, removal of body parts and butchering. In New South Wales there was evidence for burning, decoration, depilation, disembowelling, removal of body parts and the throwing of rocks onto corpses. The South Australian data included comments about the use of cannibalism, bone breaking and the removal of body parts. Evidence for the removal of body parts and for relatives jumping on corpses was available for Victoria; and Tasmanian literature included descriptions of burning, removal of body parts and butchering.

Most of the preparations described above should be detectable in the archaeological record. Some would be easier to recognise than others because evidence for them would survive longer, or because they affected the corpse more in the first place. In all cases some evidence for burning should survive. Apart from burning, results of cannibalistic practices would be apparent only if the bones had been modified in some way. Token cannibalism, where only pieces of flesh were eaten, would probably leave no clues as to its occurrence. Both broken bones and the removal of body parts should leave some trace of what had happened. Little evidence for decoration and depilation would remain, even after a short time had elapsed except, of course, for traces of ochres.

Position of corpse

Table 9D indicates the position corpses were in when they were buried. Where tying was instrumental in the moulding of the position, I refer to Table 9E. To simplify the analysis, I have divided positions into extended, flexed and contracted. An extended position is one in which the corpse was laid out with no limbs bent; in a flexed one the corpse was arranged with limbs gently bent, in a relaxed posture; and a contracted arrangement occurred when the limbs were bent so that the corpse was confined to a much smaller space than normal. These definitions are not meant to be more than general guides. The confusing and incomplete nature of some of the data prevents greater precision.

Among the people who lived south of the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers in Victoria, corpses were laid out at length in their graves (Howitt 1904: 451). The natives from the southern district of York, Toodyay and Vasse, in Western Australia, buried some corpses on their sides. These were not stretched out but placed in a slightly curved position (Bates n.d.: 32/129). When aged people died amongst the *Larrekiya* of the Northern Territory, they were buried in a recumbent position, usually lying on their right side, with their legs tucked up against the trunk and their head on their hands - a position like a *foetus in utero* (Basedow 1925: 205).

Some positions described in the literature, do not fall easily into any one of the three divisions. For example, Bates (n.d.: 32/31) reported, but I could find no confirmation for the statement, that some tribes from the Kalgoorlie area of Western Australia, buried their dead with an arm or leg protruding from the grave. In the country south of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, when a man died one of his arms and one of his legs were doubled up and tied; the other arm was placed across his chest, the remaining leg was doubled up but left free (Elkin 1937: 297).

The occurrence of extended, flexed and contracted positions are plotted on Map 19. The contracted variety is widespread throughout the burial area, being reported for all states in Australia except Tasmania. Evidence for extended burials is less common, though it is also described for every state

except Tasmania. Flexed positions, which are much more difficult to assess, are only acceptably located for Western Australia. In summary, contracted and extended positions are found in all states except Tasmania, flexed ones occur in southwestern Australia.

If archaeological excavations are carefully and scientifically carried out, the positions discussed above should be detectable.

Tying of corpse

On Table 9E I have summarized all those instances whereby corpses were tied before they were buried. Examples in which corpses were tied after they had been enclosed in a garment or blanket, are listed on Table 9F and discussed in the section on wrapping. Those parts of the body that were tied before burial included fingers, toes, arms, and legs; sometimes whole corpses were bound into compact positions.

The following examples indicate the range of this custom: On the Ashburton River in Western Australia, the thumbs of corpses were tied together (Bates n.d.: 32/42). Amongst the Aborigines from Cooper's Creek in South Australia, all corpses had their big toes tied together (Curr 1886: II, 62-3). In the Busselton area of Western Australia, legs and thighs were tied together (Bates n.d.: 32/14), while on the Maranoa River in Queensland, corpses' toes and hands were tied together - toes to toes and hands to hands (Howitt 1904: 467). Tying associated with contracted positions varied considerably - for example, the people from Yanda Station in New South Wales, prepared men for burial by binding them in a "thrice bent sitting position until *rigor mortis* had set in" (Dunbar 1943: 145). The *Ngarigo* from northeastern Victoria, tied corpses tightly. Knees were bent and arms crossed. The hands were placed open on either side of the face and the knees were drawn up to the head (Howitt 1904: 461 and 462).

The various types of tying are plotted on Map 20, and summarized on Figure 2. All the evidence occurred in the southern half of the continent.

present in parts of southeastern Australia. Head north-feet south, had a sparse and dispersed distribution in western Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. Head east-feet west was recorded intermittently across southern Australia; it was more common in Western Australia than anywhere else. The single reference to a head west-feet east position, was located near the Geraldton in Western Australia. Several descriptions of bodies placed in east-west arrangements were from Western Australia, as were those recording north-south evidence. A single reference to a corpse's head being placed towards the northwest came from the Sydney area of New South Wales. The data referring to the placing of heads towards unknown places is described for Western Australia, the Northern Territory and northeastern Victoria.

In other words, there was evidence from Western Australia for eight of the nine orientations. The Northern Territory only showed evidence for the direction of heads towards unknown places, Queensland only for the head north - feet south position. The South Australian literature contained evidence for the placing of corpses: head west - feet east, head south - feet north, head north - feet south, and head east - feet west. Apart from the northwest orientation, New South Wales had some evidence for burials in which corpses were placed head south - feet north. Finally, head west - feet east, and heads directed towards unknown locations, were recorded from Victoria.

It should be possible to detect from most scientifically excavated burials, the orientation of corpses' faces and bodies. Original burial positions may be modified by later disturbances, but these should also be obvious in archaeological sections.

Locality of grave

Descriptions of all localities where graves were excavated, appear on Table 9H. The areas mentioned were: sand and soft soil, hills and slopes, regular burial grounds, locations near harbours and water, forests and trees, living floors, ants' nests, mangrove forests, and animal holes. The following examples give some idea of the range of places chosen for burials.

section below.

From southwestern Australia, there were several references to the association of carved trees and simple burials. At Kojonup and Etipup, for example, if there were any trees in the vicinity of the grave, they were "slightly marked" with circles (Bates n.d.: 32/12). Near the Murray River, Bunbury and Vasse in Western Australia, trees near graves were marked in notches, circles or lines. No one pattern seemed to be used exclusively in any district as Bates (n.d.: 32/27) saw three different markings in one area. The markings were usually rubbed with ochre.

The Aborigines who lived at Pine River, a few miles north of Brisbane in Queensland, sometimes recorded the presence of a grave on a tree by taking a big piece of bark off one side and a smaller piece off the other (Battershill: MS).

The rest of the references to carved trees associated with simple burials were recorded from New South Wales and northern Victoria. On Yanda Station, in western New South Wales, after some burials, bark from a tree situated south of the grave was removed and designs "similar to the cicatrices on men's chests were marked on the tree; aged aborigines declared that they could identify the man who was buried nearby whenever one of these trees was located" (Dunbar 1943: 146). At Jindabyne in the Snowy Mountains district of New South Wales, men of note were buried in a sandy spot and the trees around were marked "in a peculiar manner" (Jardine in Ethridge 1918: 54). The *Kamilaroi*, who lived in country between the Liverpool Ranges and Gwydir River in New South Wales, marked the bark of trees that stood near burials, with "devices" (Fraser 1882: 229). In the northern part of this country, headmen were sometimes buried adjacent to one of the carved trees in their *bora* grounds (Naseby in Howitt 1904: 467). In southeastern Australia, west of the Great Dividing Range, the *Wiradjuri* buried their dead and marked the surrounding trees (Gribble in Howitt 1904: 465-6).

On Map 36 I have plotted all references to simple burials with carved trees. They occurred mainly in south-

from Central Australia. For twelve to eighteen months after his burial, his wife collected small bones of animals such as the jaw bones of possums or rabbit kangaroos, and the leg and arm bones of various other small animals. She also collected these from her relatives. From her husband's relatives, she obtained short locks of hair to which, by means of resin from porcupine grass, she firmly attached the bones she had been collecting. Groups of these were then hung from the head rings which were commonly worn by women. In addition, the widow procured the white tail tip of the rabbit-bandicoot and made plumes from the tail feathers of the ring-necked parrot or the black cockatoo. "In this way a hideous chaplet is made" (see Spencer and Gillen 1928: 436, Figs. 128-9). When the time came for the *Urpilchimilla* ceremony the woman went to her husband's grave and scratched a hole in the top of it. She and younger women then took off their chaplets, tore them to pieces, and deposited them in the hole. In addition, torn fur string rugs, feather tufts and rabbit-bandicoot tails, were placed in the hole. These objects were then covered with earth.

2. Mourning caps have been discussed in the Australian Aboriginal literature since Europeans first arrived in areas where they occurred.* Several major works have been written about them. In 1899, Ethridge published "The Widow's Caps of the Australian Aborigines" and in 1948 Davidson published his "Mourning Caps of the Australian Aborigines". I have used both of these papers extensively when looking for references and when acquiring a general background for the analysis of the phenomenon. I should make it clear here what I am prepared to accept as a mourning cap, particularly as Davidson, and to a certain extent Ethridge, saw mourning caps as one aspect of a wider practice to do with the use of white clay for mourning. White colouring was certainly used widely in Australia as a sign of mourning. However, the difference between such a general use, and that in which a cap was constructed on a mourner's head and later placed on a grave, was immense. It was a different custom, even though mourning was the common motive. I am aware of

* See Plates 1, 9 and 10; Plate 1 is the frontispiece

